

IRT Digital Society and Economy

Minimum Digital Living Standards

WORLD
CHANGING
GLASGOW





Agenda

- 1.15 – 1.30 pm Welcome and Introduction. Minimum Digital Living Standards (MDLS), project team and funders. Bridgette Wessels
- 1.30 – 2.15 pm: Overview of MDLS project: Simeon Yates, Katherine Hill and Jeanette D-Arcy.
- 2.15 - 2.30 pm: Break
- 2.30-3.00 pm: Research in Practice: Simeon Yates, Katherine Hill and Jeanette D-Arcy.
- 3.00 – 3.15 pm: Reflections. Bridgette Wessels
- 3.15 – 4.00pm: Discussion and Q&A



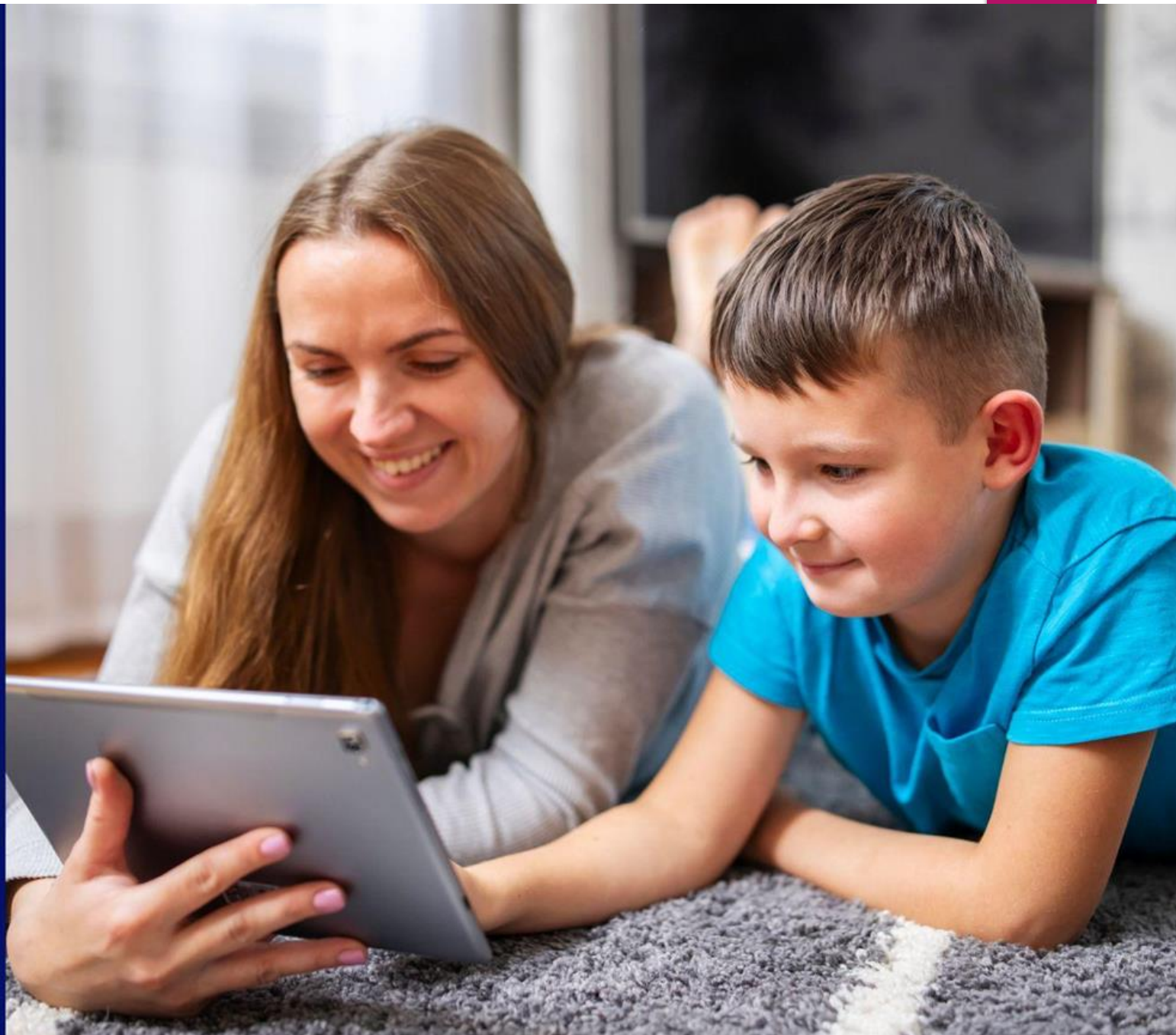
Participant Quote

- 'If you want people to survive in the world, you need food, you need water, and that is your human rights. Now having connectivity that is usable, affordable, should be on there somewhere, because you can't survive in this world, the day and age that we're living in, without them'

Parent

The Minimum Digital Living Standard

March 2024





Minimum Digital Living Standard: A new approach to digital inequalities

Simeon Yates - Professor of Digital Culture - University of Liverpool

Chloe Blackwell, Katherine Hill, Abigail Davis, Matt Padley - Loughborough University

Emma Stone - Good Things Foundation

Elinor Carmi - City University

Alex Singleton, Gianfranco Polizzi, Jeanette D'arcy, Rebecca Harris, Zi Ye - University of Liverpool

Supriya Garikipati – University College Dublin

Paul Sheppard – Critical Research

Existing measures of digital inequality

- **Binary measures of access to digital technology or not** (such as PC ownership)
- **Different levels of access** (such as variations in broadband speed)
- **Differences in digital skills/literacies** (such as ability to use basic features)
- **Differences in levels of use** (such as measures of frequency or complexity of use)
- **Differences in types of use** (variety of use or types, such as educational use)
- **Differences in benefits from use** (personal, financial, social, cultural, health, etc)
- **Differences in hazards from use** (levels of potential risks and harms)

Limitations of taking an individual view

- ▶ Digital inclusion is about **all aspects of everyday life**, especially interacting with people and culture – not just using services
- ▶ We know that access to digital equipment and services is partly or wholly **household based** not individual
- ▶ We know from prior studies (e.g. Nuffield Me and My Big Data) that **individuals rely on close family and friends for support**

Periodic Table of Internet Elements

Me Medical	Ho Housing	Fn Finances	Et Employment/ Training	Gv Government services	Ci Civil	Ed Education	Et Entertainment	Cm Community	Cr Creativity	Sc Social connection	Mo Mobility/ access
Te Test results	Sh Social housing/ Recreation	Pc Price comparison	Jh Job hunting	Wc Work commitments	Oa Online activities	Se Search engines	Vi Video streaming	Og Organising	Se Self- expression	Ff Friends & family	Na Navigation and maps
Pr Prescriptions	Ha Housing education/ contact	Fi Financial information	Ap Applications	Be Benefits application	Pe Partners and pact	Cl Classroom learning	Ga Gaming and e-sports	Cg Community groups	Re Making reels	Vc Video calls	Ac Assistive technologies
Ph Public health information	Hh House hunting	De Debt advice	Ne Networking	Im Immigration services	Nw News	OI Online learning	Gm Gaming	Su Survivor support	Bl Blogging	Sm Social media	Vo Voice activated assistance
Mh Mental health	Mm Mortgage management	In Online investing	It Interviews	Uc Universal credit journals	De Democratic debate	Hw Homework submissions	Eb eBooks	Vo Volunteering	Pl Platforms	Em Email	Db Doorbells
Gp Consultations	Mn Mortgage interests	On Online shopping	Wk Working and learning	Co Council services	Mp MP email	Li Online libraries	Mu Music streaming	Oc Online communities	Mc Music creation	Im Instant messaging	DI Deliveries
Hs Hospital appointments	Bl Mortgage bills	Ob Online banking	Tx Tax forms	Me Free school meals	EI Electoral register/census	Kn Online knowledge	Mv Metaverse	Vp Vop Platforms	Vr Virtual reality	Ev Events	Sm Smart systems
Sg Support groups	Ct Council tax	En Energy bills	Sh Side hustle			St Student finance	Ra Radio/ podcasts		Ar Art	Od Online dating	Pm Password Managers

Kat Dixon, 2022

Limitations of taking an individual view

- ▶ We know from the pandemic that household access to digital goods and services is key for:
 - ▶ **Children's access to education**
 - ▶ **Household access to healthcare**
 - ▶ **Household access to local and national government services**
- ▶ We know that **many households (28%) are struggling with digital access due to cost-of-living crisis** (Ofcom)
- ▶ We know that many UK households are led by limited digital users:
 - ▶ **34.2% of households with children are led by different types of limited digital users** (Yates, et al., 2020)
 - ▶ **59% of the UK working-age population (3.9m people) lack essential digital skills** (future.now)

MDLS projects

UK Minimum Digital Living Standard project

Funded by Nuffield Foundation

1. MDLS fieldwork
 - Deliberative groups with members of the public including young people
2. National survey (UK wide)
3. GIS mapping of survey outcomes
4. Understanding specific community challenges

Developing the Welsh MDLS

Commissioned by Welsh Government

- Phase 1
 1. Stakeholder Delphi review
 2. Additional Welsh MDLS fieldwork
- Phase 2
 1. Interviews with families below MDLS
 2. Understanding specific community challenges in Wales

Minimum Digital Living Standard: Methodology

- Draws on Minimum Income Standards approach
- Public opinion of need
- Bottom-up approach: decisions from parents and young people
- Series of deliberative focus groups
- Households with children in the UK



A minimum digital standard of living includes, but is more than, having accessible internet, adequate equipment, and the skills, knowledge and support people need.

It is about being able to communicate, connect and engage with opportunities safely and with confidence.



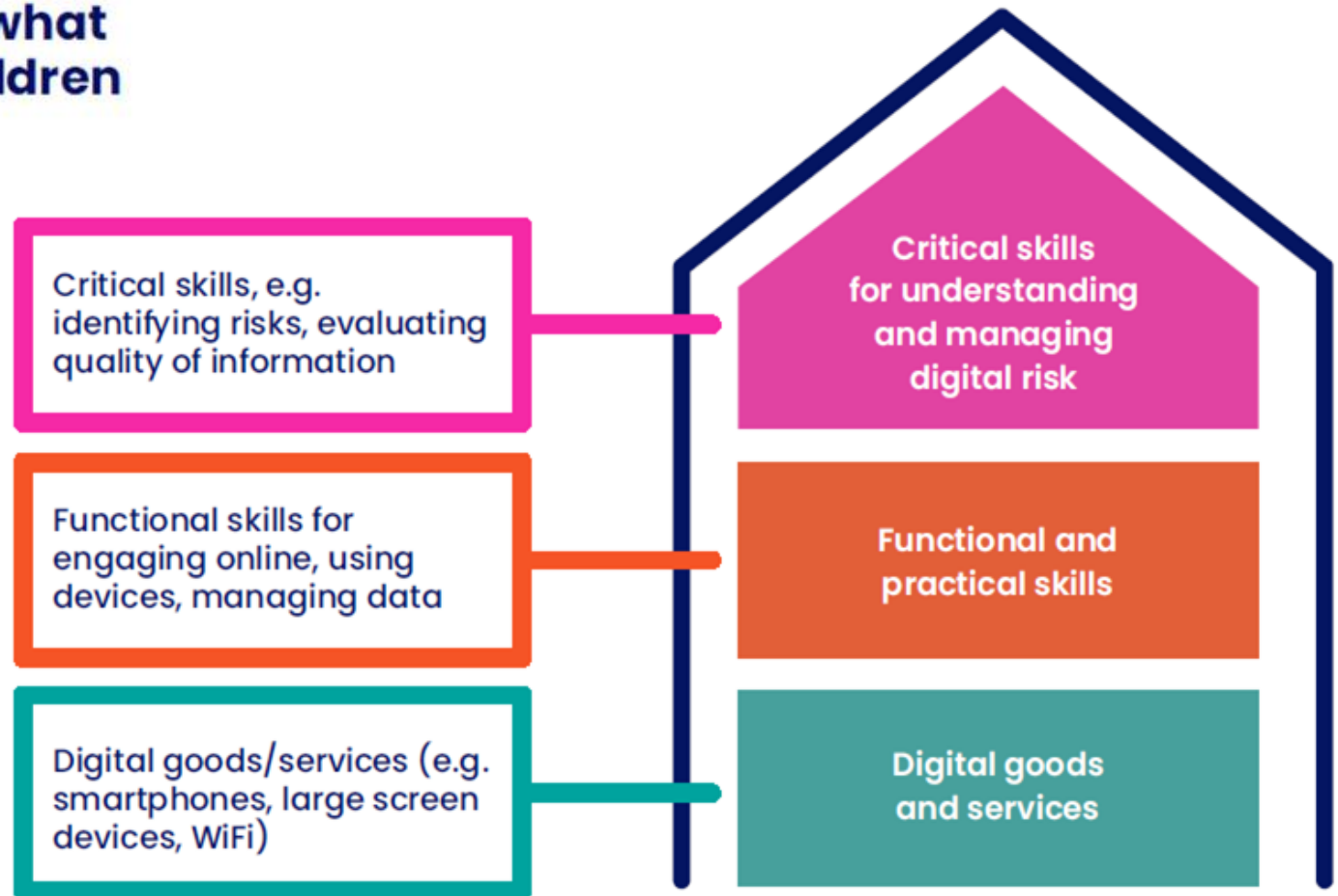
What is 'enough' for households with children?

Parents and young people defined what is 'enough' for a household with children to feel digitally included.

They thought about:

- What devices (entry level) and internet services a household needs to take part in society
- What skills they need for practical tasks and digital safety
- How needs change with family size and school stages

These are the MDLS 'contents'.



MDLS 'contents'



MDLS is a starting point for thinking about family needs, barriers, and how needs can be met.

All elements are needed – in combination – for a household with children to feel digitally included.

Digital goods and services

Home Broadband	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With sufficient reliability and speed to support all family members to access the internet at the same time
Mobile phone and data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An entry-level smart phone per parent and secondary school age child + 5GB data per month each An extra 3GB of data per month if they have a child of pre-school or primary school age.
Large screen device	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A laptop, tablet or PC per household – parent(s) and first child share one device. An additional device for every further school age child.
Headphones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A set of headphones for school age children
Television and TV subscription	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A smart TV, entry-level 32" screen An entry-level TV subscription service (e.g. Netflix, Disney+) in addition to a TV licence
Access to online gaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An adequate large screen device and access (via an entry-level subscription or other means) for school age children to be able to participate in online gaming with their peers

Functional skills

Using digital devices, programmes and the internet	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Using device functions Using apps and programmes Downloading apps and programmes Saving and recovering documents Connecting devices to the internet/hotspots Changing settings
Engagement online	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Using Zoom/Teams/Google classrooms Performing browser searches Using school apps (homework, school-home communication) Creating an email account and sending emails Online bookings and forms (e.g., appointments) Cashless/online payments
Managing and monitoring digital devices and data usage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Creating and sorting files and folders Turning off devices properly Deleting old files to manage device storage Monitoring and managing phone data usage

Critical skills

Managing security	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Using secure passwords Knowing about and avoiding in-app purchases Using phone safety features out and about (e.g., 'triple tap' or 'SOS') Monitoring banking activity online Removing bank card details to avoid accidental purchases <p>Knowing how to apply parental controls</p>
Interacting with others	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluating what details to share online Identifying risks (e.g., scams, unsafe links, catfishers, groomers) Evaluating friend requests Managing social pressures and time online
Sharing and receiving information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluating quality of information (e.g., identifying mis/disinformation or unrealistic images) Knowing how to avoid and report inappropriate/offensive content Understanding digital footprint

Skills

The skills outlined below are needed by parents, and colours indicate the age/stage by which children need to begin developing these skills, according to parents and young people.

1 Pre-school 2 Early primary school 3 Late primary school 4 Early secondary school 5 Late secondary school

Digital access is essential for family life

Greater implications for families already facing challenges

- Universal Credit, with risk of sanctions / loss of benefits.
- Reporting as homeless or registering for social housing.
- Proving identity for residency or seeking asylum.
- Accessing health services, online support networks.
- Maintaining relationships in separated families.

A phone call is not as nice as a video call, is it? And obviously, with them living so far away, it's better for them to see my face than just hear my voice. (Parent)

Some families may need extra or different ways to meet MDLS

- Accessible kit or software – disability, neurodivergence, language barriers.
- Gaming - a 'lifeline' for children on the autism spectrum – broadband needs.
- More mobile data to keep in touch - especially if a health condition or disability.
- Children's digital skills more significant if parents rely on them to use the internet

The outside world is just somewhere I don't want to be. So online, I can be myself without anyone knowing me. (Young person)

Affordability – implications for digital goods and services

Unable to buy, replace, update devices

- Sharing devices, relying on mobile phones.
- Devices aren't adequate / fit for purpose.

Meeting families' internet needs

- Insufficient internet – can't afford faster speed
- Or 'no choice' but to pay for higher price broadband
- Restricting mobile data.

Some are meeting digital needs, but at what cost?

- Having to borrow, use credit, make sacrifices to keep (children) online.

What about social tariffs?

- Low awareness.
- Insufficient for a families' needs.
- Exit fees inhibit switching providers.

YP 1: If I'm somewhere where there's no free Wi-Fi, I end up connecting to [friend's] internet.

YP 2: None of my friends let me... It's annoying. Because most of the time I go places that there's barely any internet anywhere, or if there is internet, you have to sign into a password.

(Siblings, age 14 and 12)

I choose paying for the internet over feeding myself because the need is so massive for my children.

(Parent)

I've tried a couple of broadband, especially ones for people on benefit. So cheaper broadband - fantastic financially, but useless for internet, because it's like the lowest speed. (Parent)

Connectivity – where you live can make a big difference

In rural and remote areas - the need for connectivity may be greater, yet it can be harder to access.

- Poor internet speed / quality, 'not enough to do anything', prone to disruption.
- Impact on families, children's homework, working at home
- Cost implications - no 'bargaining power' if limited providers.
- Lack of mobile signal - practical issues and also concerns about having no connection when out.
- Problems in urban areas too.

Lack of broadband in temporary accommodation

- Lack of privacy where access in a communal space.
- Young people unable to access their 'social worlds', impact on isolation and mental health.
- Dependent on mobile data, finding free Wi-Fi.

Connectivity is both disproportionately more expensive and disproportionately more vital for rural areas (Stakeholder)

You're quite limited to who you can go with because the connection's too slow in the areas that we are...I think they've said it's the mountains that affect the connection and you can't move them! They forgot about us down here! (Parent)

'The fear of not having signal it's a real life worry for me'. 'Like realistically, I don't go anywhere, I don't do anything because the fear of not being able to phone that ambulance'. (Parent)

Digital skills, safety and responsibilities

Functional and practical skills and needs vary across and within households

- Family members may be confident in one area but not another.
- Uncertain how to deal with obstacles / where to get support.

Digital safety is a big issue for parents but understanding and keeping on top of digital risks is difficult.

- Time, pace of change 'overwhelming', a 'minefield' to find (reliable) information.
- Hard to balance children having independence, monitoring their safety, and 'invading privacy'.

Parents and young people saw digital safety as a shared responsibility with individuals, schools, state and tech companies all playing a role.

It is society, digital society. Society is made up of all of those groups and everyone has to do something. (Parent)

So, it's down to you as a parent then isn't it, to update the thing and I haven't got no clue. I should educate myself on it. But where would I go, I don't know. (Parent)

Once your teenager sees it as control, the conversation is over then, that is finished. (Parent)

If you find your parent doing something on your phone you would lose the trust with them, and then you will rebel more. (Young person)

Survey design

- ▶ The final survey was administered in person at home and covered a nationally representative sample 1,582 UK households from all UK administrations (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) and was undertaken in 2023. The 1,582 households provide separate data on:
 - ▶ 2,605 adults with parental responsibility
 - ▶ 300 other adults
 - ▶ 891 secondary school children
 - ▶ 1,162 primary school children
 - ▶ 681 pre-school children
- ▶ A total of 4,616 individuals in the 1,582 households. With a +/-2.46% margin of error for a 95% confidence level against a population of 8,196,000 UK households.
- ▶ All data were provided by one household respondent who was an adult with parental responsibility.
- ▶ We collected data on household device ownership and access to the Internet.

Survey design

- ▶ We collected data from the respondents on their assessment of other household member's confidence with key skills identified in MDLS.
- ▶ It was not possible to include all skills questions in the final survey.
 - ▶ For an adult, there are 29, and for an older teenager, there are 27 separate skills.
 - ▶ For a household with two adults and two teenage children, we would need to ask over 110 skills questions.
 - ▶ This would not be possible within a reasonable one-hour maximum time scale for the in-person survey administration.
- ▶ We, therefore, undertook a pilot survey of 207 households (603 adults and children) asking **all** skills questions. We then statistically reduced these using PCA/Factor analysis to a core set of key skills for the survey.
 - ▶ This gave us lists of between 2 and 9 skills for each age group of children and through to adults

Overall model of meeting the MDSL

The stats...for those who want them

Constant 0.793[^](**) (0.341) * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

Social grade and deprivation (compared to AB)

NRS grade C1	-0.267 (0.174)
NRS grade C2	-0.569*** (0.183)
NRS grade DE	-0.774*** (0.212)
Combined IMD rank	-0.00002* (0.00001)

Household composition

Single parent	-0.271** (0.106)
2+ children	-0.521*** (0.125)

Work and benefits

Receives at least one state benefit	-0.318* (0.163)
Chief income earner working	0.363* (0.196)

Health and ethnicity

Respondent has a health issue affecting daily activity	-0.698*** (0.191)
Respondent identifies as ethnically non-white	-0.698*** (0.159)

Town size (compared to a large city)

Smaller city or large town	0.866 (0.561)
Medium town	1.237** (0.558)
Small town	1.550*** (0.546)
Rural area	1.417** (0.573)

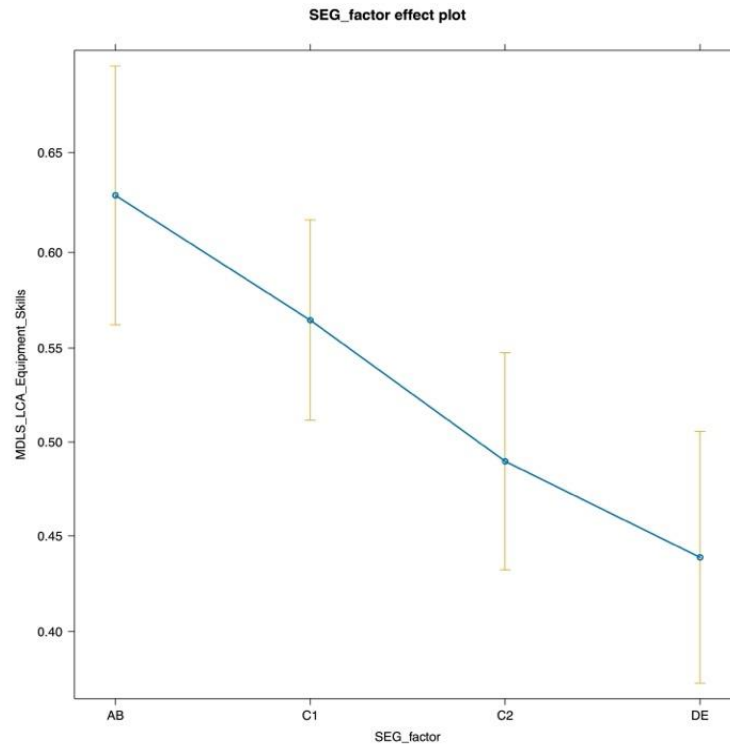
Region (compared to London)

EE	-0.932 (0.605)
WM	-1.144* (0.598)
SE	-1.370** (0.598)
YH	-1.290** (0.605)
W	-1.404** (0.635)
SW	-2.046*** (0.611)
EM	-1.461** (0.619)
S	-2.102*** (0.551)
NE	-1.651** (0.654)
NW	-1.978*** (0.608)
NI	-2.478*** (0.655)

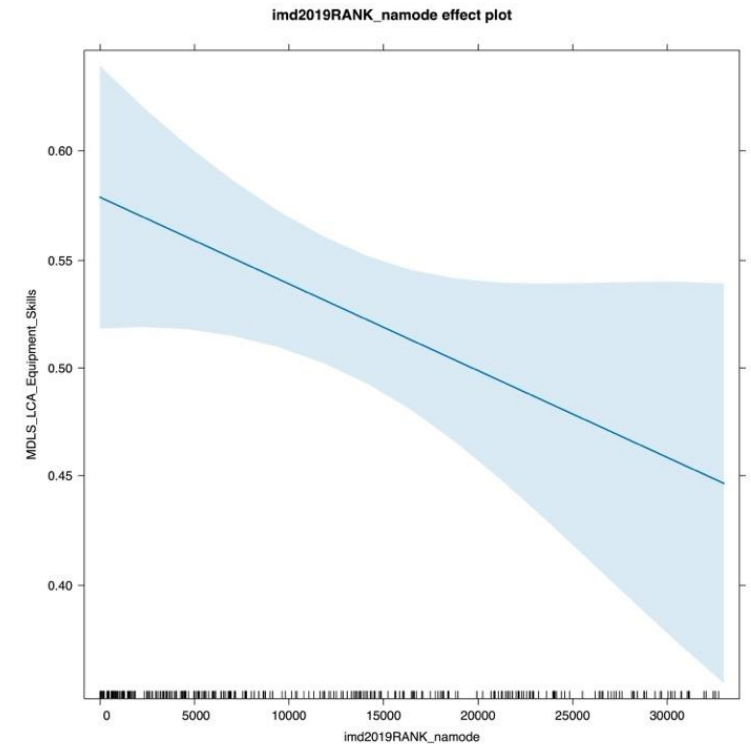
Log Likelihood (-973.519) Akaike Inf. Crit. (2,003.038)

Overall model of meeting the MDLS SEG and deprivation

- Compared to social grades A and B, **social grades C2, and DE** are 1.7 and 2.1 times **less likely** to meet the MDLS.

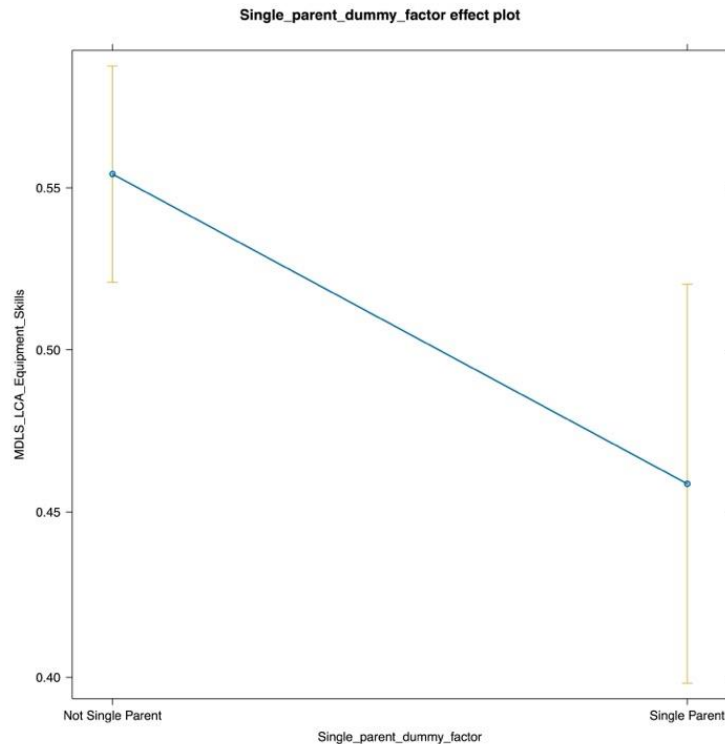


- Each decile of **worsening IMD rank** position for the household's area **decreases** the likelihood of meeting MDLS by between 0.05 and 0.03, dropping from 1.0 at the least deprived to 0.59 at the most deprived.

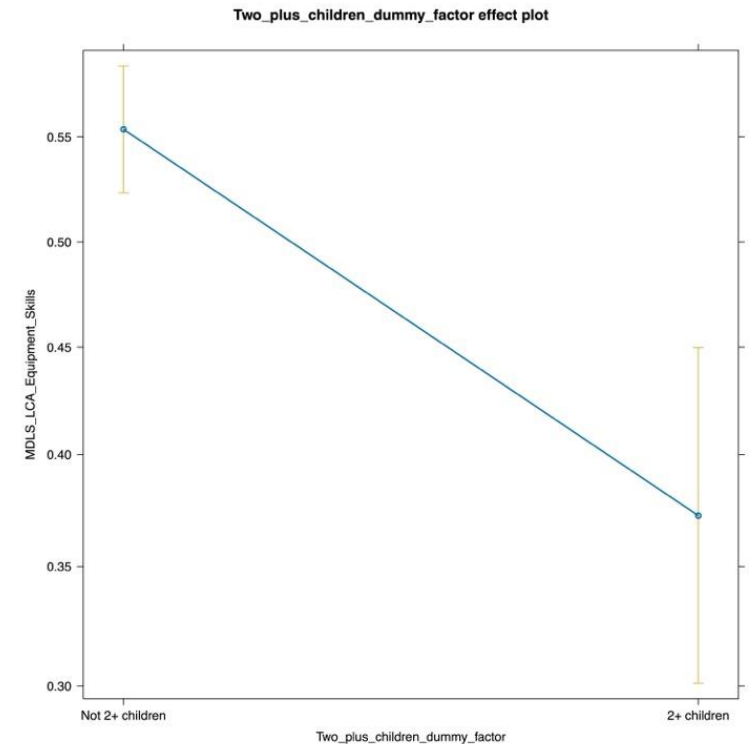


Overall model of meeting the MDLS Household composition

- **Single parents** are 1.3 times **less likely** to meet MDLS as compared to dual-parent households.

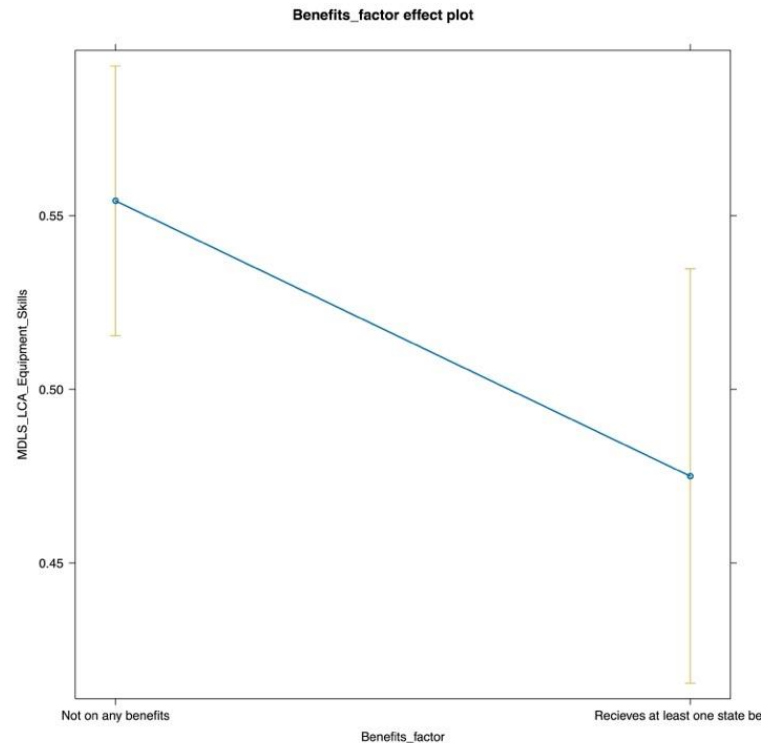


- **Households with more than two children** are 1.68 times **less likely** to meet MDLS as compared to households with less than two children.

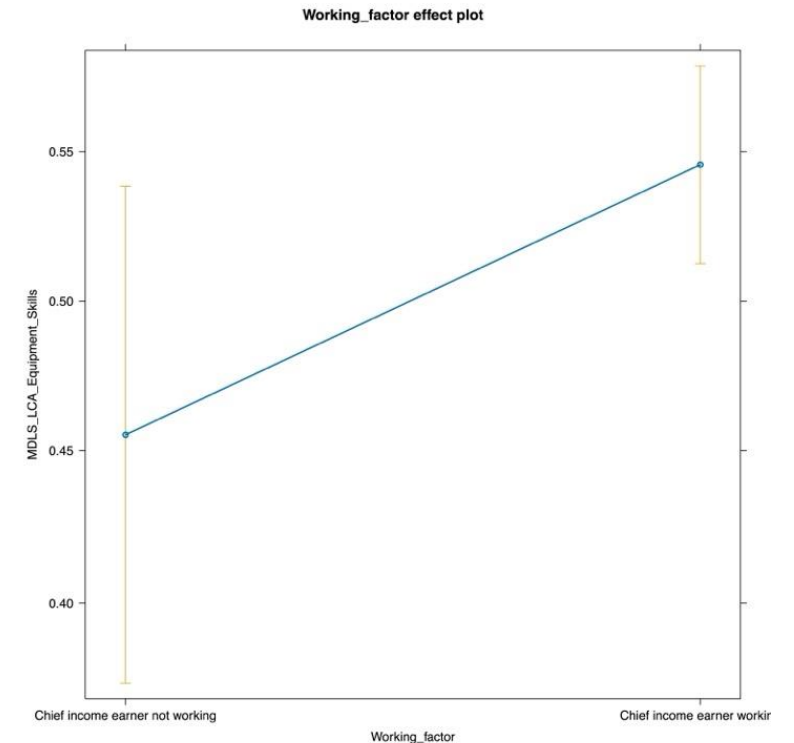


Overall model of meeting the MDLS Benefits and employment

- Households receiving at least one state benefit are 1.38 times less likely to meet MDLS compared to households that do not receive benefits.

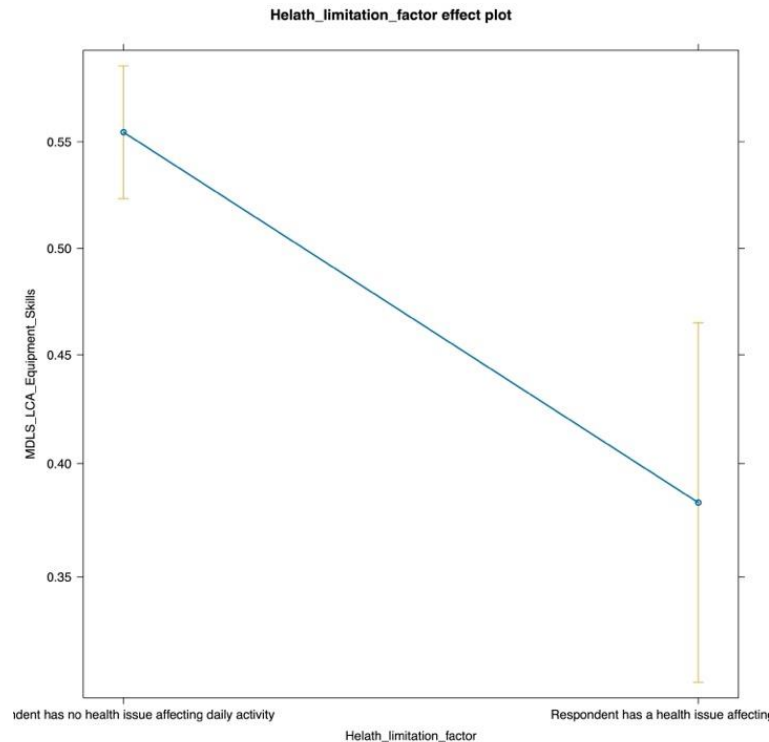


- Having the **main income earner employed** makes a household 1.44 times **more likely** to meet MDLS than households where they are unemployed.

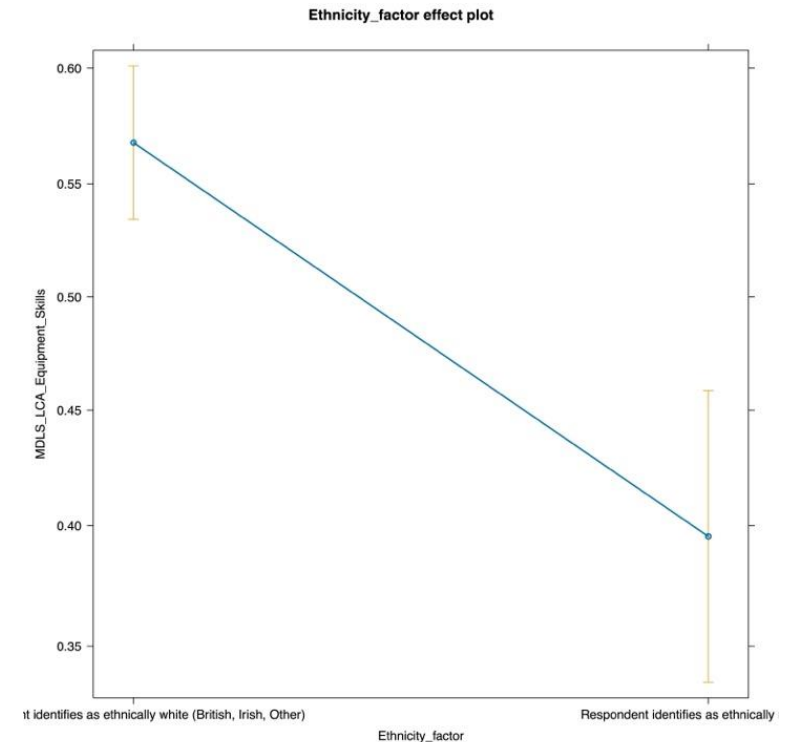


Overall model of meeting the MDSL Health and ethnicity

- Households where the survey respondent has a **health issue affecting their daily activity** are **2.01 times less likely** to meet MDLS than those who do not.

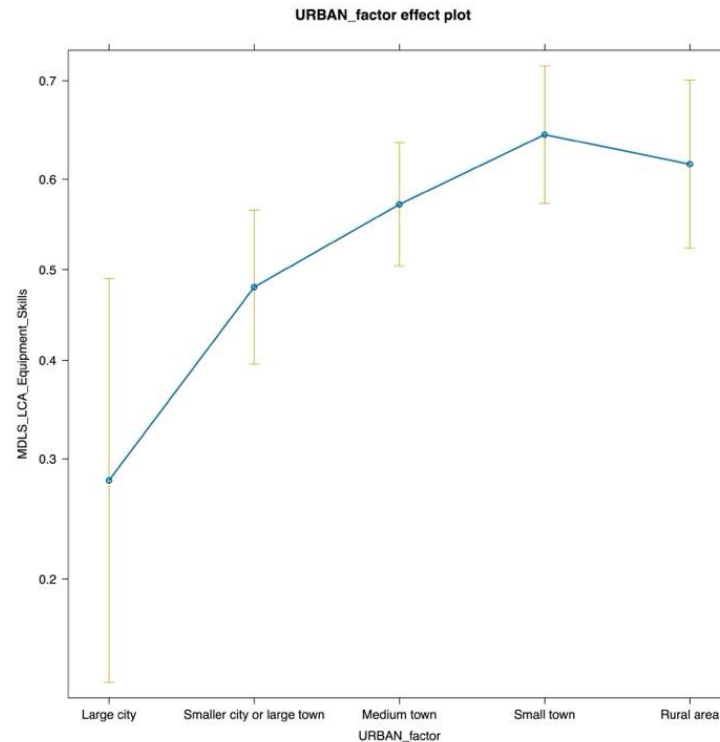


- Households with **survey respondent identifying as ethnically non-white** are also **2.01 times less likely** to meet MDLS than those who are white.

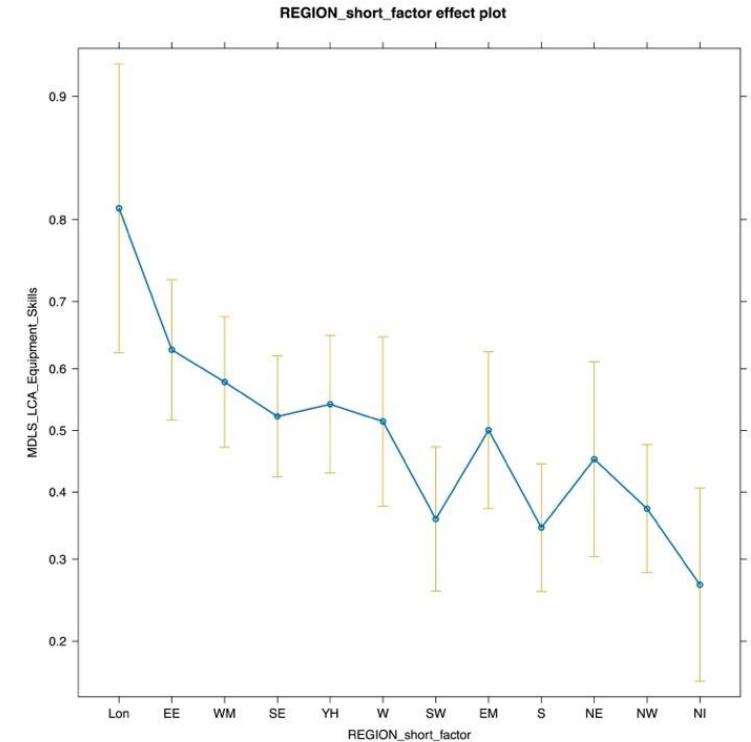


Overall model of meeting the MDLS Urban and regional location

- Households in **smaller cities or large town** are 2.38, **medium towns** are 3.45, **small towns** are 4.71, and **rural areas** are 4.13 times **more likely** to meet MDLS than those in large cities.



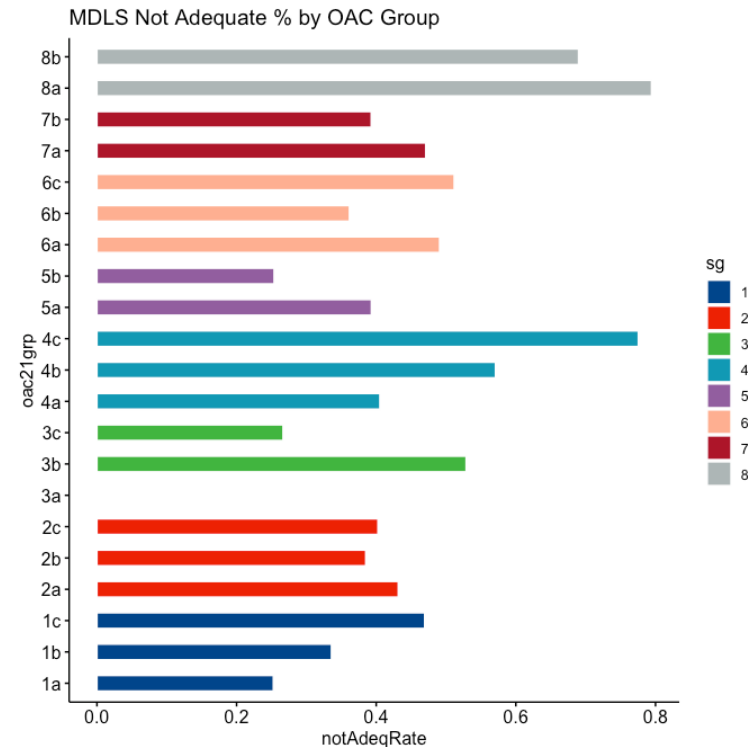
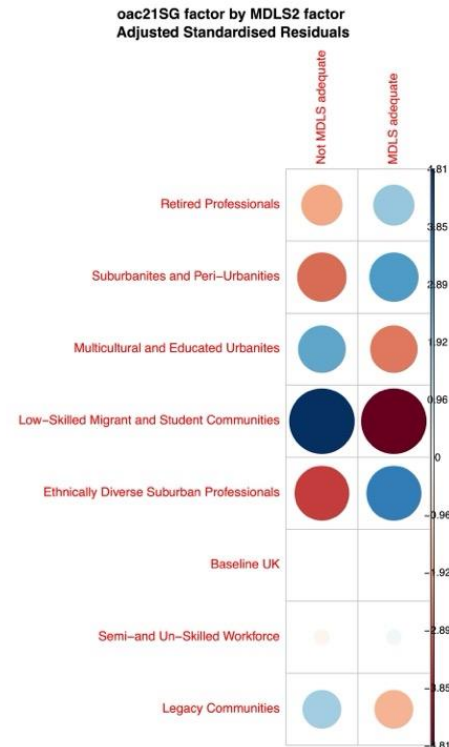
- All households **living outside London** are **less likely** to meet MDLS with the worst locations being North East, North West, South West, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.



Overall model of meeting the MDLS

Output area classification

- MDLS groups are well distributed by OAC supergroups OCA and OAC groups.
- All other factors considered, living in a **Low-Skilled, Migrant, or Student Community**, makes a household 1.48 x less likely to meet the MDLS.





Mapping

- ▶ <https://felt.com/map/Map-8EksfQudQDuGYRWHPkjiAD?loc=56.136,-3.373,5.69z>

Example cases

- Household A: A **single-parent** household with **one child** living in an area of relative affluence in South East.
- May be **4.5 times more likely** to meet MDLS than:
- Household B: A **single-parent** household with **more than two children**, living in an **area of higher multiple deprivation** in the North East, where the parent has a **long-term health issue**.
- Household C: A **dual-parent** household, social grade AB, with **two children, working** and living in a small town in **Wales**.
- May be **5.1 times more likely** to meet MDLS than:
- Household D: A **dual-parent** household, social grade DE, with **two children, working** but receiving **benefits**, where parents identify as **non-white**, and living in a small town in **Wales**.



The Minimum Digital Living Standard

Wales: Stakeholder response, policy and next steps for
putting the research into practices

MDLS for Wales: Phase One

- Phase One proof of concept
- Phase Two Citizen and Stakeholder Perspectives





MDLS for Wales: Strategic Context

- Digital Strategy for Wales, Mission Two: Digital Inclusion
- Wellbeing of Future Generations Act: Status of Digital Inclusion

MDLS for Wales: Stakeholder findings



Stakeholders in Wales (across public, private, voluntary and community sectors) welcomed the ideas of a national benchmark for digital inclusion for Wales. They felt this could:



Support coordination across Wales, encouraging the Welsh Government and others to take more risks and work more collaboratively to achieve such a standard



Enhance and develop their digital offers as organisations based or working in Wales, directing more resources into supporting the digital lives of people they support



Consolidate a long-term commitment to improving digital equality in Wales, driving prioritisation of digital inclusion higher up the agenda for policy and investment.

MDLS for Wales: Stakeholder findings

- Affordability barriers, particularly in the context of the current cost-of-living crisis
- *“In terms of that cost and affordability side, it's not just broadband at the moment, it's electricity, if you'd have can't pay your electricity bill, then you can't access the internet”.*
- Policy lead at a social housing provider.
- Infrastructure barriers - broadband and mobile data infrastructure, but also wider infrastructure especially (but not limited to) rural areas in Wales.
- *“There are very isolated communities and homes, within Wales, big farming communities, coastal communities. And I think they do present some challenges around internet connectivity. And that's something that needs to be at the forefront of thinking around any digital offering.”*
- CEO of a Housing Association
- Parity of the Welsh language in digital systems, services, training, and support
- *“From our point of view, [the development and implementation of a W-MDLS] ... has to be bilingual, it has to be through the medium of English and Welsh, and both languages given equal prominence”.*
- SMT for an organisation providing support, advice, and funding opportunities to civil society organisations.

MDLS for Wales: Stakeholder findings

- Ability of providers and organisations to help households achieve the standard.
- Importance of recognising, identifying, and addressing equalities, diversity, and inclusion
- Identifying roles for the Welsh Government, local government, and others, including to influence central Government, regulators, and UK companies on behalf of Wales

MDLS for Wales: Next Steps



National Survey for Wales: new questions



MDLS Pilot: social housing residents



Thank you for listening!